The Revolutionary Spirit in Great Britain

By W. P. CROZIER

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INDUSTRIAL unrest is like one of those skin diseases which are subject to a periodic ebb and flow; they die down for a time and then return with unabated, or increased, virulence. The armistice was followed in England by a dense crop of labor troubles; partly by peaceful negotiations and partly by strikes both large and small. Large increases of wages were granted to labor and for a time it seemed that we had reached a sort of equilibrium unstable though it might be, and that the country might settle down to hard work and to the increased production which we all of us, masters and men alike, declare to be necessary for our salvation.

We are not to be so fortunate. The cost of living, despite continual newspaper reports of a "slump" in this or that commodity, continues steadily to rise. The high profits made and the large dividends declared during the last summer by innumerable companies have conveyed to labor that there is a still larger "slice of the melon" waiting for them if they will but have the resolution to insist on getting it. At the same time economic unrest is perpetually stimulated by political irritation. The Russo-Polish question brought us to the very threshold of a general strike and caused the formation of a Labor "Council of Action" which was in implication and purpose a revolutionary body, a committee of public safety, calculated to supersede government and Parliament, as it would assuredly have done had the general strike been declared and fought successfully on such an issue.

And now comes the return wave of the economic rash on the body politic.

The miners throughout the country have handed in notices that they will strike, and they have received the general support of the two fraternal unions—the railwaymen and transport workers—which make up with them the triple alliance. This is much the worst of the clouds which at present overhang us, for it is the mark of a great miners', as of a railwaymen's, strike that it is unlikely to be very prolonged without producing grave social and political no less than economic results. The stopping of the mines involves the rapid dislocation of industry and transport; if continued it means scarcity, want and the resultant "civil commotions" the end of which no one can foretell. A general strike has always in it the possibility of revolution and a miners' strike is not so dissimilar in fundamentals that the same attribute can be denied to it.

The miners' demands are two—a wages claim of the old conventional type and a second of a novel and even revolutionary order. The wages claim is for another two shillings a shift (some ten shillings a week) and the miners justify it on the ground that whereas the cost of living has gone up since 1914 by not less than 165 per cent, the additional wages so far granted them on that account do not amount to more than 125 per cent and that in strict logic they are entitled to more than a two shilling increase. Clearly this is a matter for inquiry and peaceful settlement, not for industrial war, and the government has suggested that the claim be referred to a court of arbitration. The real trouble is with the second demand, which is of a very different kind. The difficulty is that the miners firmly refuse to separate their two demands and to allow either to be considered independently of the other.

The second demand is that the price of household coal should be reduced by 14s. 2d. (about 2½ dollars) a ton. In the first place, be it observed, the miners take on themselves to fix the price of coal, which is at present the duty of the government. That is in itself a political and economic development of the first importance; it is the wage-earning producer asserting the right to fix the price at which the product of his labor shall be sold to the public. This is to go further even than nationalization would carry us. Virtually all the schemes either for nationalizing the mines or for giving the miners a large share in the management would place the fixing of prices in the hands of joint bodies in which government officials, the public and the miners would have their several places. But at the present moment the miners are asserting the right single-handed to fix the price of coal for the community. Whether the reduction in price which they demand is justified or not is a small matter in comparison with the far-reaching principle which they are seeking to introduce into our economic life.

But why, it will be asked, have the miners chosen to plunge into this question? Naturally they represent their own action as being mainly altruistic. "If we take 14s. 2d. a ton from the price of your coal," they say to the general public, "the average family will gain £4 10s. a year."

But there is much more in the matter than this. When the government raises the price of coal, as it has had frequently to do, the miner gets a fair share of the blame, since it is his increased wages that are mainly responsible for increased price and the extreme public apathy with regard to the miners' pet scheme of nationalization may partly be traced to this cause. The proposal, therefore, for a reduction of price by 14s. 2d. is tactical and looks ahead; the public are to be grateful to the miners for providing cheaper coal and are consequently to look more favorably on the nationalization which the miners demand. It is in itself a reasonable argument and, if the miners could carry their demand, might meet with some popular success.

But a large reduction in the price of household coal would have to be paid for by some one, and the question is, by whom? The miners assert that the surplus profits now being made by the mines are so great that both reduction in price and increased wages could be paid out of them and still a balance would be left. Even so, there would be a very heavy loss to the exchequer, which would no longer have the surplus profits to tax and the money would have to come from some other source. "Certainly," say the miners, "but we would not take it from the working classes; we would take it from the middle classes, the bourgeoisie, the capitalists, so the workers would still gain."

There are some who read even a deeper plan in the minds of the men's leaders. At present the government is working toward de-control of the mines, intending to give them back to their private owners when they are in a state of solvency. But if wages be increased and the price reduced under the present government system, then the government will have to continue its control until the position, especially of the weaker mines, has been improved, that is to say, indefinitely. And so long as the machinery of government control continues, so much the simpler will it be to introduce a scheme of nationalization for the industry. This is, at all events, the process of reasoning which is attributed to the miners by certain of their critics. But the simpler explanation is really sufficient—that the miners, recognizing the complete failure so far of their propaganda hope to win over the public by presenting them with cheaper coal and to thrust on the government the odium of burdening the masses of the people, if it dare, with heavier taxation than they already pay. Thus in its political and social implications the miners' demand for a reduction in the price of coal is much more significant than the new wages claim.

The other disputes which are now raging are each in their several ways symptomatic of our critical state of economic health. The trouble in the engineering trade arose from the trivial but vexed question of the appointment of a non-union foreman in a single works, but eventually the employers have locked out the men throughout the industry. The minister of labor has intervened to get the dispute referred to an arbitration court and he may succeed, but the engineering trade is the battle ground where for many months both sides are popularly said to have been "spoiling for a fight" and to be organized "to the last button." Resort to arbitration is certainly not popular at present. In one of the other great disputes which I have mentioned, that which affects over 70,000 people in the potteries, the workers have already refused the arbitration which was proposed to them.

The printers' strike, which for more than a week suspended the Manchester and Liverpool newspapers, was remarkable because it illustrated a new and grave tendency in the trade union world—the refusal of sections of the men to accept settlements made by their national representatives. It is the third instance of this tendency which we have experienced in this one district within a few months. Gas workers, tramway workers and now compositors have all revolted violently against the terms arranged between their own national representatives and those of the employers. The action of the Manchester and Liverpool printers was the more astonishing in that all the other trade unions associated with the printing trades and all the other compositors of their own union throughout the country accepted the latest settlement. They, however, defied their own officials, and have declared a lightning strike.

The course of trade union development is thus thrown violently backward. For generations labor and capital in this country have been developing collective bargaining and establishing, wherever possible, a national basis of settlement in each industry. And there is no doubt that on the whole this method was leading to greater stability of conditions and a firmer industrial peace than separate claims, disputes and settlements following each other in an endless series in every trade or district. But a new spirit of discontent and revolt has been begotten of the war. It is not only economic discontent. It is a revolt also against discipline and authority, even of those whom labor itself has chosen for its leaders. There lies the point of danger. At the bottom of all this turmoil—of the Labor Council of Action appointed to override the government, of the endeavor of the miners to settle the price of coal by a strike in an essential industry, of the repudiation by the printers of their duly constituted leaders—lies the revolutionary spirit. In England we are by no means yet out of the wood.

The Dishwasher Who Became Bishop of a Great Church

By WILLIAM BURDETTE MATHEWS

IN DECEMBER, 1882, a black boy, 17 years old, was trying to make his way back to his home and birthplace at Union, West Virginia, from Toledo, Ohio, where he had been a laborer on public works and in coal mines, but he decided to spend Christmas in Charleston. The chief reason that impelled him to stop at the latter town was because he ran out of funds at that point. Instead of waiting for a position, he took the first job which presented itself—that of dishwasher at the Hale House. On the princely wage of $2 a week he soon was enabled to proceed on his way.

The boy who found means to make his way at 17 has succeeded in making his way ever since. On May 20, 1920, he was elected by the recent general conference at Des Moines, Iowa, by 569 votes out of a total of 734 votes cast, a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the highest honor that can come to a minister of that faith. On Sunday, May 23, 1920, Matthew Wesley Clair, former dishwasher at the Hale House, was consecrated to that high and holy office, and he is now performing the duties of that exalted station.

That black boy who had been so signally honored was never a wild, reckless lad. He was born at Union, in Monroe County, West Virginia, October 21, 1865. His parents were loyal Christians and the very name they gave their son, Matthew Wesley, was both Biblical and Methodistic. While a lad he readily responded to their training. In his own words he confessed, "I always was devout and revered my Lord. Even in early childhood I played preacher."

The Methodist Episcopal Church always looked after the spiritual welfare of the colored race and so young Clair was early attracted to it. It is not surprising therefore that "Matt" in childhood professed the Methodist faith. He early "felt the call" to the ministry.

After completing the course in the graded schools of Union, he went to Baltimore, Maryland, and entered the Centenary Biblical Institute, now Morgan College, graduating from both the classical and theological courses. During this period he won all the prizes offered for proficiency in literary and oratorical attainments. He continued his studies leading to and earning the degrees of Ph.B., and later Ph.D., from Bennett College, Greensboro, North Carolina. He still continued his work, doing, among other things, a two-years' residence course at the Catholic University, Brookland, D. C.

BISHOP MATTHEW WESLEY CLAIR,
of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Howard University and Morgan College each have honored him with the degree of Doctor of Divinity. On June 3, 1920, Morgan College conferred the degree of LL.D. upon her favorite son.

In March, 1889, he joined the Washington Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. His first appointment as pastor was Jefferson Circuit, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, where he served creditably four years. In 1893 Bishop E. G. Andrews ordained him an elder and appointed him to Staunton, Virginia. So well did he perform his work that he was sent from there in 1896 to Ebenezer Church, Washington, D. C. At the close of his year's work in that church he was appointed presiding elder of the Washington District and served with distinction and great credit for five years in that position.

At the conference of 1902 he was appointed to Asbury Church, Washington, D. C. During his pastorate of seventeen years the church was rebuilt. It is probably the best appointed structure, as well as one of the most imposing, among the Negro membership of the denomination, and has the distinction of having been planned and built by the congregation which occupies it—one of the most loyal and progressive organizations in Methodism. He was so favorably and well known throughout the church that when the general conference held in Des Moines last May ordered the election of two colored bishops and began to cast about for two capable and worthy Negroes to be elevated to the high office of general superintendent of the church, a position never before filled by a Negro, the thought and attention of that body focused on the Rev. Dr. Matthew W. Clair as one of the first two Negroes thus to be honored.

Bishop Clair has been assigned to Liberia as the standard bearer of Methodism and Christianity.